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ABSTRACT

Intended for students taking the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test in Alberta, Canada, this reading test (to be administered along with the questions booklet) contains eight short reading selections taken from fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, including the following: "Thieving Raffles" (Eric Nicol); "Flight of the Roller Coaster" (Raymond Souster); "The Buyer" (Gilles Vigneault); an excerpt from "The Mystique of Mars" (Dennis Overbye); "Elephants" (Patrick Lane); an excerpt from "A Doctor in the West" (William Morrison Gibson); "Winter Uplands" (Archibald Lampman); and "The Dinner Party" (Mona Gardner). (SRT)

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Readings Booklet

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Grade 9 English Language Arts
ACHIEVEMENT TEST

Part B: Reading (Multiple Choice)

June 1986

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GRADE 9 ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
ACHIEVEMENT TEST

PART B: Reading (Multiple Choice)

READINGS BOOKLET

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Part B of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test has 65 questions in the Questions Booklet and eight reading selections in the Readings Booklet.

BE SURE THAT YOU HAVE A QUESTIONS BOOKLET AND A READINGS BOOKLET.

You **MAY** write in the test booklets. However, you **MUST** place your answers on the answer sheet provided.

You may **NOT** use a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference materials.

YOU WILL HAVE 1½ HOURS TO COMPLETE THIS TEST.

JUNE 1986

1. Read "Thieving Raffles" and answer questions 1 to 6 from your Questions Booklet.

THIEVING RAFFLES

Anybody know how to make a delicious Christmas dinner out of old turkey raffle tickets?

That's what we've got at our house. No turkey. Just raffle tickets. Big raffle tickets, little raffle tickets, blue ones, red ones, yellow ones. My wallet is full of them. No money. Just raffle tickets.

The turkey raffle tickets cost more this year, too.

Two bits each, some of them. This year we paid more for the turkey we don't get to eat than we paid for the turkey we didn't get to eat last year. Never before have so few paid so much for sweet nothing at all.

For many years I have bought my turkey raffle tickets according to a system. The system is infallible. It never wins.

Sometimes I buy the last ticket in the book. Sometimes I buy a ticket with a number whose figures add up to three, the way I add. Once I bought a ticket from a girl because *she* had a nice round figure. That one cost me plenty before I was through. I could have bought a whole turkey farm with the big fat upshot of that raffle ticket.

Anyhow none of these devices works. The turkey is always won by some playboy who didn't even consult his astrological chart before making the investment.

Some people are born lucky. They usually look like Bing Crosby, have a golf handicap of four and are married to a lovely woman who has given them two children — a boy and a girl.

But to get back to the turkey raffle tickets. I remember we did win once. That was about fifteen years ago, and we won two turkeys for the same Christmas. Instead of Lady Luck's smiling on us regularly, she turned around for this one bellylaugh.

We found we didn't have a pan large enough to hold the [first] turkey, so we bought a new pan. Once we got the turkey into the pan we found it wouldn't go into the oven. The top of the oven caught the turkey a good two inches below the crest of the breast bone, so for a while there it looked as though we might have to build a fire in the bathtub.

I think we finally got the turkey in by laying it on its side. Or maybe it was by laying the stove on its side. Anyway, we cooked it and stuffed ourselves with it and on Boxing Day it still looked in better shape than any member of the family.

That turkey was around so long we grew to hate all forms of bird life. After the first week Mother didn't even bother to camouflage it as chicken à la king or Irish stew. We just tore at the great carcass in cold fury, uttering low, inhuman cries.

I forget what happened to the second turkey.

Well, that has never happened again. This year we have had to buy a wild duck for Christmas dinner. It isn't really a wild duck. Actually it's a tame duck that went mad with hunger. We found it hanging in the butcher shop with a note beside it explaining why it did it. "Life isn't all it's quacked up to be," the duck had written.

Some of you people won't believe that was what the duck wrote and will say I just made it up. These are the same people that don't believe in Santa Claus. There are too many cynics in the world, and too many turkey raffle tickets. I'd like to see anybody disprove that.

Eric Nicol

11. Read "Flight of the Roller Coaster" and answer questions 7 to 12 from your Questions Booklet.

FLIGHT OF THE ROLLER COASTER

Once more around should do it, the man confided . . .

and sure enough, when the roller-coaster reached the peak
of the giant curve about me, screech of its wheels
almost drowned out by the shriller cries of the riders.

instead of the dip and plunge with its landslide of screams,
it rose in the air like a movieland magic carpet,
some wonderful bird,
and without fuss or fanfare swooped slowly across
the amusement park,
over Spook's Castle, ice-cream booths, shooting-gallery.
And losing no height

made the last yards above the beach, where the cucumber-cool
brakeman in the last seat saluted
a lady about to change from her bathing-suit.

Then, as many witnesses reported, headed leisurely
out over the water,
disappearing all too soon behind a low-flying flight of clouds.

Raymond Souster

III. Read "The Buyer" and answer questions 13 to 19 from your Questions Booklet.

THE BUYER

One winter day, upon returning from his trapper's cabin, my father announced happily that he had met the fur buyer. They had stopped their dog sleds to greet each other. "I'll drop over to see you," the buyer said. "I've got two or three squirrel tails to show you," my father had answered, laughing.

The buyer came. He had a name which I have forgotten. He sat down, accepted a drink and talked with my father about the snow, about the March storms, and about the wood that had been cut that winter. About the furs, not a word. They eyed one another. Under cover of their conversation I had crept into the room, the living room in our home, where the furs were piled up nearly as high as me (I was six then). The red foxes and the silver ones, the mixed, the white and black and those that were all grey; the brown and black minks, the most beautiful of all; the long otters, so soft to the touch, and the lynxes, those big cats that behave like tigers and about which every trapper has a terrible story to tell when he comes back from his cabin. Then, on the top of the pile, covering the muskrats, were the weasels that seemed so white, and sometimes whiter still when there was a spot as black as jet against their snowy fur, and also the squirrels. A trapper is not a sportsman and if sometimes my father took weasels and squirrels, it was because they sold well. The two men were behind me, measuring each other, trying to outguess each other, each keeping an eye on the impressive pile of furs.

The buyer spoke first. "Can I have a look?"

Without waiting for an answer that wasn't going to come, he reached for the pelts, started shaking them, held them up to the light, stroked them and blew on the fur. It went on and on for over an hour. From time to time he would make a comment, show appreciation, or give a disapproving "Huh" without ever raising an echo. I kept a close watch on my father's silence. I could feel him being hunted. The trap laid before him was a word that shouldn't have been said, or should have. It was hard to say which.

When he was through, the buyer declared without raising an eyebrow, as if talking to the stack of pelts: "Not worth much. Pity, too. Would have been good fur. This year it's beaver. Don't have any beaver, do you?"

My father said nothing. But his silence was like an icy wind blowing over the plains at dusk carrying tomorrow's snow. His silence was as hard as the ice covering the lakes on the other side of Blue Mountain.

The buyer added, as if talking to himself, quite determined not to change his mind and ready to shake the dust from off his feet: "Could give you a hundred bucks for the lot, but I wonder what I'd do with them."

Then my father, who is the most hospitable man I know, asked him politely to

Continued

get out. The other did, in a hurry, without even daring to offer an excuse. He was in such haste to be elsewhere.

There was not another buyer the whole winter long and every evening my father would go into the room and say to himself: "What insults me most is to have killed all those poor animals for nothing."

In the spring he sold the lot to a merchant who dealt in something else. Two hundred and fifty dollars. It was nothing. As for me, I had got quite used to all those beasts in "the parlour" and when I discovered, coming back from school one lovely April afternoon, that the fur corner was completely empty, I started to cry and declared to everyone that it was the buyer who had come back to steal them and I would kill him. And one day I will.

Gilles Vigneault

IV. Read the excerpt from "The Mystique of Mars" and answer questions 20 to 26 from your Questions Booklet.

from THE MYSTIQUE OF MARS

There are two worlds called Mars. One is the planet of reality, on which the Viking landers — silent now — sit: a sere[1] landscape of frost, dust, and red rock, cleaved by lonely canyons and empty river channels. The other Mars is the planet of imagination, a world haunted by past glories, where an ancient civilization lingers in the ruins beside globe-girdling irrigation canals. It is a world of strange relics, hills of gold, robot slaves, and short green men with bulging foreheads who, feeling the breath of winter on their backs, cast occasional covetous glances at the warm green Earth. The imaginary Mars, born years ago of a blend of science and pseudoscience, has lived on in books, movies, and comics, and in the minds of scientists. . . .

As soon as astronomers discovered that planets were in fact worlds, however, Mars became earthmen's favorite home for aliens — a planet close enough to exchange cosmic greetings with. As early as 1820, the German mathematician Karl Gauss proposed growing a huge triangle of wheat surrounded by pine trees in Siberia as a way of attracting the attention of the Martians. A Frenchman, Charles Cros, suggested building a big mirror to focus sunlight and burn numbers into the Martian sand. In 1899 the inventor Nikolai Tesla actually tried to "talk to the planets" from his Colorado laboratory near Pikes Peak by generating powerful electromagnetic surges from an electrical coil 70 feet in diameter, but merely succeeded in making light bulbs glow for 25 miles around.

The best rationale for all this wishful activity was provided in 1877 by the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli, who observed the Red Planet through a telescope and saw laced on its surface many fine lines. He referred to the lines as *canali*, Italian for channels. But the word was mistranslated into English as canals. And canals, of course — as opposed to channels — had to have builders. Schiaparelli's sightings were disputed from the start. Many astronomers pointed out that the supposed canals were too small to be resolved by the telescopes then available. Schiaparelli, they contended, was a victim of an illusion caused by the eye's tendency to join faint irregular features into lines.

The skeptics were overpowered, at least in the public eye, by Percival Lowell, a diplomat turned astronomer. A great popularizer of astronomy, he founded Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, and sparked the search for a ninth planet that culminated in the discovery of Pluto in 1930. Lowell suggested that the Martian canals had been built by an advanced civilization to irrigate the arid planet with water from its melting icecaps. Undeterred by the reservations of more sophisticated astronomers, he continued to observe Mars and map its canals and the cities that presumably thrived at their intersections. The maps blossomed with romantic place names like Utopia and Elysium, threaded by rivers like the Styx and the Atlantis. In 1908, Lowell reported that the known canals totaled 437, most of them discovered by his own astronomers.

Continued

[1]sere — dried up

The legend of the canals receded when large telescopes like the 200-inch on Palomar Mountain focused on Mars and showed an image bereft of networks of lines. But some diehards were not convinced until Mariner 4 sailed past Mars in 1965, radioing back pictures of a cratered, moonlike, and apparently lifeless planet.

If the idea of life on Mars is a wishful thought, it might also be a self-fulfilling one. Mars still needs people. Having been pulled across the millions of miles of void by a dream, we may find that Martians do indeed exist. They are, or will be, us.

Dennis Overbye

V. Read "Elephants" and answer questions 27 to 34 from your Questions Booklet.

ELEPHANTS

The cracked cedar bunkhouse hangs
behind me like a grey pueblo
in the sundown, where I sit
to carve an elephant
from a hunk of brown soap
for the Indian boy who lives
in the village a mile back
in the bush.

Fred, the alcoholic truck-driver,
and the cat-skinner, sit beside
me with their eyes closed, all
of us waiting out the last hour
until we go back on the grade —

and I try to forget the forever
clankclankclank across the grade
pounding stones and earth to powder
for hours in the mosquito-darkness
of the endless, cold mountain night.

The elephant takes form —
my knife caresses smooth soap,
scaling off curls of brown
which the boy saves to take home
to his mother in the village.
Finished,
I hand the carving to him
and he looks at the image of the great
beast for a long time, then
sets it on dry cedar
and looks up at me . . .
What's an elephant?
he asks me,
so I tell him of the elephants
and their jungles; the story
of the elephant graveyard
which no-one has ever found
and how the silent
animals of the rain-forest
go away to die somewhere
in the limberlost of distances
and he smiles at me —

Continued

tells me of his father's
graveyard where his people have been
buried for years; so far back
no-one remembers when it started
and I ask him where the graveyard is
and he tells me it is gone
now, where no-one will ever find it,
buried under the grade of the new
highway.

Patrick Lane

VI. Read the excerpt from *A Doctor in the West* and answer questions 35 to 41 from your Questions Booklet.

from A DOCTOR IN THE WEST

When I informed the town council that we would be building on Mrs. Hogge's land, they were enthusiastic. There hadn't been a house built in Okotoks for years but with a resident doctor in town, other folks might feel encouraged to build. However, there was one small snag. The council had joined the Calgary and District Planning Commission. They could not give me permission to build without seeking the Commission's approval, and suggested that I should go into Calgary for an interview, accompanied by one of their number who would officially support my application.

My next step was the matter of an interview with the planning commission. Jim Tucker was elected by his fellow councillors to accompany me.

"It'll just be a formality," said Jim. "They'll be delighted to think that after all those years, Okotoks is getting a new house built, and getting a doctor of its own again."

In high spirits, Jim and I drove into Calgary and presented ourselves at the offices of the planning commission, where we were referred to the appropriate officials.

They were newcomers and it became obvious as I spoke to them that they had not been on the Prairies any length of time. They knew no more than I did about the vagaries[1] of climate in the Western plains. My heart sank immediately. They obviously intended to take their duties very seriously, and after listening to our proposals, maps were produced and with grave nodding of heads and pursing of lips, we were informed that the project could not go forward. Permission to proceed, we were told, might be given after due process of deliberation.

I'd heard that kind of official jargon before, but diplomacy, I thought, might still prevail.

"How long will it take to come to a decision?" I asked.

"We don't know. Possibly a few months."

Jim explained that the council was anxious that I should build at once and I exclaimed, "But if we have to wait for a few months it'll be winter! And my builder will leave me!"

"They all say that," was the rejoinder.

"How long," I asked, "have you two fellows been out here, anyway? Have you ever *experienced* a Prairie winter? Have you ever even *been* to Okotoks?"

No, they said, they didn't know much about Okotoks but they had "plans" for Okotoks and permission to proceed was denied. Implementation of their "plans" was to come nearly twenty years later!

Finally I announced that at 6:30 the following morning, Walter Thompson would

Continued

[1] vagaries — unpredictable actions or occurrences

start up his bulldozer and that if my bureaucrats presented themselves at the site with legal documents, I'd be pleased to peruse[2] them.

Building that house was the best advertisement we could ever have had. People came from miles around to see it being built and to offer the builder advice, all of which he listened to with great good humor.

If ever a house was built with loving care, it was that one.

When it was finished, the house was a warm and comfortable place. The living room, lined with birch, was to see many a happy gathering in the years to come.

After surviving the cold winter gales, snug and cozy in our lovely new home, I one day received an official-looking document. It was a letter from the planning commission telling me that I could build the house!

Morris Gibson

[2] peruse — to read carefully

VII. Read "Winter Uplands" and answer questions 42 to 46 from your Questions Booklet.

WINTER UPLANDS

The frost that stings like fire upon my cheek,
The loneliness of this forsaken ground,
The long white drift upon whose powdered peak
I sit in the great silence as one bound;
The rippled sheet of snow where the wind blew
Across the open fields for miles ahead;
The far-off city towered and roofed in blue
A tender line upon the western red;
The stars that singly, then in flocks appear,
Like jets of silver from the violet dome,
So wonderful, so many and so near,
And then the golden moon to light me home —
The crunching snowshoes and the stinging air,
And silence, frost and beauty everywhere.

Archibald Lampman

VIII. Read "The Dinner Party" and answer questions 47 to 54 from your Questions Booklet.

THE DINNER PARTY

The country is India. A colonial official and his wife are giving a large dinner party. They are seated with their guests — army officers and government attachés and their wives, and a visiting American naturalist — in their spacious dining room, which has a bare marble floor, open rafters, and wide glass doors opening onto a veranda.

A spirited discussion springs up between a young girl who insists that women have outgrown the jumping-on-a-chair-at-the-sight-of-a-mouse era and a colonel who says that they haven't.

"A woman's unfailing reaction in any crisis," the colonel says, "is to scream. And while a man may feel like it, he has that ounce more of nerve control than a woman has. And that last ounce is what counts."

The American does not join in the argument but watches the other guests. As he looks, he sees a strange expression come over the face of the hostess. She is staring straight ahead, her muscles contracting slightly. With a slight gesture she summons the native boy standing behind her chair and whispers to him. The boy's eyes widen, and he quickly leaves the room.

Of the guests, none except the American notices this or sees the boy place a bowl of milk on the veranda just outside the open doors.

The American comes to with a start. In India, milk in a bowl means only one thing — bait for a snake. He realizes there must be a cobra in the room. He looks up at the rafters — the likeliest place — but they are bare. Three corners of the room are empty, and in the fourth the servants are waiting to serve the next course. There is only one place left — under the table.

His first impulse is to jump back and warn the others, but he knows the commotion would frighten the cobra into striking. He speaks quickly, the tone of his voice so arresting that it sobers everyone.

"I want to know just what control everyone at this table has. I will count three hundred — that's five minutes — and not one of you is to move a muscle. Those who move will forfeit fifty rupees. Ready!"

The twenty people sit like stone images while he counts. He is saying "... two hundred and eighty ..." when, out of the corner of his eye, he sees the cobra emerge and make for the bowl of milk. Screams ring out as he jumps to slam the veranda doors safely shut.

"You were right, Colonel!" the host exclaims. "A man has just shown us an example of perfect control."

"Just a minute," the American says, turning to his hostess. "Mrs. Wynnes, how did you know that cobra was in the room?"

A faint smile lights up the woman's face as she replies: "Because it was crawling across my foot."

Mona Gardner

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